

Quarterly Newsletter from American Citizens Services (ACS) Kuala Lumpur – Summer 2012

Lost Passport Haiku (Courtesy of ACS Hong Kong)

Long weekend! Passports

Drop from Amcit's pockets like

Autumn's falling leaves

("Amcit" is internal State Department abbreviation for American Citizen)

It's true! Every Monday we have a small clutch of lost passport cases, generally requiring the issuance of emergency passports. The first day after a long weekend, whether it's an American or local holiday, the clutch tends to be much bigger, and we can be very busy dealing with them along with the other weekend emergencies.

The connected world has made these cases much easier and more routine. We can now reach into the State Department's passport records and quickly identify an American, confirming their identity and nationality on line. Those records are very closely held and every time we access them we have to again swear to the computer that we're making a legitimate inquiry and state what the basis of the inquiry is. I perfectly understand that given how sensitive passport records are and I'm extraordinarily grateful for the tool, so I treat it like gold. Not so many years ago, a lost passport meant going through whatever documentation the person might have left after their loss, and a long, probing interview to determine, at least to some degree of certainty, who they were and whether they were entitled to the U.S. passport. It was hard on the consular officer and hard on the applicant, and, in cases of doubt, the process could be held up for days while the evidence was collected.

Outright loss is not the only reason to need an emergency passport. Many of the jurisdictions surrounding Malaysia require six months' validity on a passport used for entry. So, on 1 July, a passport that expires on 15 December will not get you into, say, Malaysia. The theory behind this is that the jurisdiction wishes to be certain that you will not be trapped in their country due to an expired passport, which means that this rule does not apply to a person travelling to the U.S. on a U.S. passport. An American citizen can stay as long as they like in the U.S. So, check your passports! In this environment we think it always wise to keep a good cushion of validity.

Another issue that can sneak up on a person is that of pages. Most jurisdictions in the region are document intensive, and a passport will fill up quickly with visas and entry and exit stamps. A trip to Bali requires at least two blank pages, and if you don't have the two pages, the airline won't board you. U.S. passports come in two sizes, and passport applicants abroad should generally ask for the larger 52 page book when they are renewing. There is no extra cost and it's likely that even a modest traveler will use the pages up over the ten year life of an adult passport. We can also add pages to a passport, but that service is no longer free (U.S. \$82) and there are limits to it. We can add two sets of pages at a time, and no more than three sets in total. But, the passport must be in very good condition for the third set, and good condition for the first two. Otherwise the bulk of the extra pages will break the binding and the book will come apart, making the passport useless, perhaps at some very inconvenient time and place. This is also the reason we can't add more than three sets of extra pages. After three sets, the only remedy is a new passport.

The U.S. passport is a very valuable document. So, please care for yours, both physically and from the point of view of security. Physically, we really recommend that you don't carry them in your back pocket. That beats a passport up very badly, from the friction, from the flexing and from the heat. A contemporary U.S. passport is a very well made product and will probably survive, but will lose some of its value as its appearance degrades. If the binding becomes weak we won't add extra pages, perhaps when you need them quickly. And, of course, check your pockets before you throw your trousers into the washing machine. The passport will survive, but in a condition that probably won't get you across the next border. The same applies to rain and boating accidents.

On the security side, protect yourself against loss. Malaysia is a generally safe environment, but there are pickpockets and bag thieves and a number of Americans have lost their passports here. Clearing customs is a stressful thing even in Malaysia, and if you couple that with just having gotten off of the plane from London or Chicago (or even Singapore) it becomes very easy to misplace things either at the airport or later on. Whatever else you might leave behind in a cab, hold on to your passport!

All that said, we will do whatever we can to help in those moments of distress. We can issue an emergency passport in the course of a business day. But you do have to be aware of the limits of the emergency passport. It's very small, with only five visa pages, and we will limit it strictly to the period of time needed for you to complete your immediate travel plans. We can't add pages to one or extend it. The concept is that you will immediately replace it with a full validity passport, which you can do on the same fee. Best not to need to need to go that route! Protect your vital documents and reduce your need to call on us in an emergency.

VOTE VOTE VOTE! Register and Request Your Ballot

New absentee voting laws are in effect for the 2012 elections. You will no longer automatically receive ballots based on a previous absentee ballot request. All U.S. citizens outside the United States who want to vote by absentee ballot in the 2012 primary and general elections must complete a new Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) every year if they wish to vote from abroad. States are now required to send out ballots 45 days before an election. No matter what state you vote in, you can now ask your local election officials to provide your blank ballots to you electronically (by email, internet download, or fax, depending on your state). You can now also confirm your registration and ballot delivery on-line. Be sure to include your email address on the form to take advantage of the electronic ballot delivery option. This is the fastest and most reliable way to receive your ballot on time, and we strongly recommend every overseas voter take advantage of it. Learn more at the [Federal Voting Assistance Program's \(FVAP\)](#) website.

The following states will hold state primaries in July, August, and September:

July:

Georgia – July 31 (state runoff primary, if necessary, August 21)

August:

Alaska – August 28, Arizona – August 28, Connecticut – August 14, Florida – August 14, Hawaii – August 11, Kansas – August 7, Michigan – August 7, Minnesota – August 14, Missouri – August 7, Tennessee – August 2, Vermont – August 28, Washington – August 7, Wyoming – August 21

September:

Delaware – September 11, Guam – September 1, Massachusetts – September 18, New Hampshire – September 11, New York – September 11, Rhode Island – September 11, Virgin Islands – September 11, Wisconsin – September 11

Tax News: Statement of Specified Foreign Financial Assets

The Internal Revenue Service would like to remind U.S. taxpayers that they may need to file Form 8938 (Statement of Specified Foreign Financial Assets). It is important for taxpayers to determine whether they are subject to this new requirement because the law imposes significant penalties for failing to comply. More information is available on the IRS tax site, specifically at [Summary of Key FATCA Provisions](#).

Overseas Travel for Children

With the summer travel season in full swing, there are many children with plans to take overseas trips with friends, relatives and school groups, without their parents. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) suggests you consider the following:

Q: Can a minor under 18 years of age travel to another country without their parents?

A: Minors may be able to travel to another country without either one of their parents. The country of destination may however require a notarized written consent letter from both parents. Entry requirements by country can be obtained under "Travel Information" [on this website](#).

Q: If a child (under the age of 18) is traveling with only one parent or someone who is not a parent or legal guardian, what paperwork should the adult have to indicate permission or legal authority to have that child in their care?

A: Due to the increasing incidents of child abductions in disputed custody cases and as possible victims of child exploitation, CBP strongly recommends that unless the child is accompanied by both parents, an accompanying adult or chaperone have a note from the child's parents acknowledging the child's travel plan and granting permission. Please visit the U.S. Customs and Border Protection website for more information.

Follow Ambassador Paul Jones on Twitter

Ambassador Paul Jones uses Facebook to share his experiences in Malaysia. He invites everyone to visit his page at <http://www.facebook.com/#!/AmbassadorJones>

STEP: Smart Traveler Enrollment Program

Everyone receiving this newsletter has registered with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) at www.travel.state.gov. Thank you for doing so! STEP allows us to reach you with important messages and lets us contact you in the event of an emergency. If you have American citizen friends who haven't, please encourage them to visit www.travel.state.gov and stay connected.

Don't forget, you can always reach us by email at klacs@state.gov, and at our website, www.malaysia.usembassy.gov.

Contact Us

Main Switchboard: 60-3-2168-5000

When dialing from outside of Malaysia, first dial the international access code (011 in the U.S.), then the Malaysia country code (60), then the area code (3), and finally the Embassy number (2168-5000).

Malaysian Mailing Address:

Consular Section, U.S. Embassy Kuala Lumpur

376 Jalan Tun Razak

50400 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

U.S. Mailing Address:

Consular Section, U.S. Embassy Kuala Lumpur

DPO AP 96535-8152

International Mailing Address:

Embassy of the United States Kuala Lumpur

376 Jalan Tun Razak

50400 Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia

Upcoming Embassy Holidays

Official Date	Date Observed	Day	Holiday	Country
August 19 & 20 (Sun & Mon)*	Aug 20 & 21*	Monday & Tuesday	Hari Raya Puasa	Malaysia
August 31 (Friday)	Aug 31	Friday	National Day	Malaysia
1st Monday in September	Sept 3	Monday	Labor Day	U.S.
2nd Monday in October	Oct 8	Monday	Columbus Day	U.S.
October 26 (Friday)*	Oct 26*	Friday	Hari Raya Qurban	Malaysia
November 11 (Sunday)	Nov 12	Monday	Veterans Day	U.S.
November 13 (Tuesday)*	Nov 13*	Tuesday	Deepavali	Malaysia
4th Thursday in November	Nov 22	Thursday	Thanksgiving Day	U.S.
December 25	Dec 25	Tuesday	Christmas Day	U.S.

* Subject to change